



## 98: Someone Who Cares by cali-chan

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**Summary:** She'd never made [the trek] in her PJs and slippers, but she'd dealt with the elements before, and at the moment it was preferable to going back to the cabin and facing the fact that the man she'd thought of as her protector had betrayed her. PG-13, hurt/comfort/family, post-S2, Mike/Eleven.

## 98: Someone Who Cares

**Someone Who Cares.** PG-13, drama/family, post-S2, Mike/Eleven. *She'd never made [the trek] in her PJs and slippers, but she'd dealt with the elements before, and at the moment it was preferable to going back to the cabin and facing the fact that the man she'd thought of as her protector had betrayed her.*

**Note:** This one goes out to **lostinhawkins** on AO3, who talked in a comment to *Thank You for (Not) Smoking* about wanting to see a story where Hopper confesses to El that he gave away her position to Brenner in season 1. I'd been struggling with just such a scenario since the day I first saw that episode and hadn't been able to crack it, but I swear to God, this idea came to me the *second* I hit the reply button on your comment. It's a freaking miracle! I hope you like my take on it. =)

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He was coming to get her, she knew it. She looked around desperately trying to find somewhere to hide, some way to call for help from anyone— Hopper, Mike, anyone— but it was no use. She was alone in the cabin and they had her surrounded, men with guns in numbers she couldn't take on her own. And Papa. Papa was with them, leading them to her. He had found her. He was going to take her back... back to that place.

She curled up on herself in a corner, partially hidden behind Hopper's bed, and tried to hold back her frightened screams when they started kicking the door loudly, clearly trying to break it down. She tried using her powers to keep the door in place, but there was only so much she could do when there were so many of them, and just as she tasted the metallic tang of blood dripping from her nose down to her lips, the door violently burst open...

...and El woke up on her bed, bathed in cold sweat, a scream just dying on her lips. For a moment she couldn't tell where she was, and

she struggled to get her feet untangled from her bedsheets in the instinctual urge to run, get as far away from danger as she possibly could. Then she felt arms try and hold her in place, and she tried to push whoever it was away with her powers, but she was so scared and so disoriented that she couldn't really focus, and the attempt was weak at best.

"Eleven!" she heard the person pulling her back bark in her ear. She continued to try and wrestle out of his grip, but the man was strong, and El was still gasping for breath from her abrupt awakening. "Eleven, you need to stop struggling—"

"No—" She continued to grapple against his hold. "Let me go— Don't want to go back—"

"El!" the man shouted again, and it was only that second time that El finally began to internalize that she recognized that voice— and it wasn't Papa. "Sweetheart, you need to calm down— you were having a nightmare—"

Breathing heavily, she stopped moving, turning to look over her shoulder at Hopper's concerned face peering down at her. "Nightmare?" she asked as she pushed herself up to a sitting position. Hopper pulled his arms back to let her move, seeming relieved that she was starting to calm down now.

"Just a bad dream," he explained in terms she could understand, patting the top of her head lightly with his large hand. "Are you all right? You didn't hurt yourself?" he asked her, looking her over quickly.

She shook her head, trying to take deep breaths to normalize her breathing. There was nothing to be scared of, it had just been a bad dream. She was with Hopper; he wouldn't let anything happen to her. She was safe.

But what would happen when Hopper wasn't around? Would she be safe when he went off to work and she had to stay trapped in this cabin, alone and unable to tell what was happening outside until one of her friends could stop by and spend time with her? Would Papa come for her then?

"You wanna talk about your nightmare?" Hopper asked, not for the first time. El shrugged. "Was it about that thing at the gate? Maybe the monster from two years ago?" She shook her head at both suggestions. "Was it about the lab?" She said nothing to that one, and Hopper seemed to understand that's exactly what it had been about.

He let out a deep sigh. "The lab is closed, kiddo. You don't have to worry about them anymore. We're only laying low for a bit longer just to be sure, but they're not looking for you anymore, okay? They won't find you."

El shook her head emphatically. "Papa can find me."

Hopper laid a hand carefully on her shoulder. "That bastard's dead, El," he assured her. "And even if he isn't, there's no way he can find you. He's on his own now. There's no way for him to find out where you are."

She shook her head again. "Papa can *find* me," she repeated, pointing to the side of her head as she spoke.

Hopper's brow furrowed, as he clearly wasn't understanding what El was trying to tell him. It took him a minute, and she saw the exact moment comprehension dawned on him. "Wait, wait... you think Brenner has *powers*?" he asked, his frown deepening, almost like he wasn't sure how to react. "You think he can find you with his mind, like you do with other people?" She nodded. "El, that's not possible."

Now it was El's turn to frown at him. He knew, didn't he? He'd been there— well, kind of. He'd definitely been there for the aftermath, as far as she understood. "He already did," she pointed out, trying to remind him. "At the school."

Hopper was immediately alarmed. "What? When was this?! Why didn't you tell me—" He cut himself off when the moment she was talking about finally clicked in his mind. "Wait... you mean two years ago?" he asked, trying to grasp what she was saying. She nodded. "On the night you destroyed the monster in the middle school?" She nodded again.

Hopper ran a hand over his face, like he did sometimes when he was

stressed. His expression was no longer anxious, but now he just seemed... what was the word? Sad, worried. Defeated, maybe. "Brenner doesn't have powers, kid," he assured her. El didn't understand, then, how Papa had managed to find her that night. At her confused expression, Hopper added, almost reluctantly, "Someone told him where you were."

It took El a little while for that to sink in, not because she didn't understand the words, but because she couldn't imagine any other way for the lab people to know enough of her whereabouts that night to be able to tell Papa where she was. And then it hit her, and she felt like the bottom of her stomach gave out. Hopper didn't mean someone from the lab had told Papa; he meant someone who was helping her had revealed her location. "Who would tell him?" she asked, terrified of the answer.

Hopper said nothing for a long time, and El felt the weight at the bottom of her stomach get heavier and heavier with every second that passed. It couldn't be, could it? No, he wouldn't do that to her... but she now recognized the expression on his face for what it was: guilt. And it chilled her blood. "Who told him?" she asked, a little more sharply.

Hopper took a deep breath before admitting, "I did." At those words, El felt like she'd been punched in the gut.

He tried to make it better. "I only did it because it was the only way they would let Joyce and I into the rift to get Will," he said hurriedly as El moved to get off the bed on the opposite side from where he was standing, shaking her head all the way. "I thought Nancy and Jonathan would get you kids out of there— Will would have died, El. If you'd just let me explain—"

"No!" she screamed, running around the bed and toward the door before he realized what was happening.

"Where are you going?" he tried when he saw her head for the door. "It's the middle of the night! You can't just wander around at this hour on your pyjamas, you're going to catch your death—" Before he could make his way out of the room, however, El waved her hand behind her and the couch slid directly in front of her bedroom door,

obstructing the way between the two of them.

"El!" he bellowed as she opened the front door. "You can't just leave like this—" She didn't hear what else he said because she slammed the door closed behind her with her mind, hoping she'd put enough force into it to jam the lock. He would come looking for her eventually, she knew, but if she put enough obstacles in his way, she could at least get a decent headstart.

He was wrong, anyway, she thought as she stepped out into the crisp spring night. She wasn't planning on wandering aimlessly around the forest. She knew exactly where she was going; she'd made the trek before. She'd never made it in her PJs and slippers, but she'd dealt with the elements before, and at the moment it was preferable to going back to the cabin and facing the fact that the man she'd thought of as her protector had betrayed her.

It took her nearly an hour, but she finally made it to the cul-de-sac at Maple Street. Looking up at the familiar house, her first thought was to go in through the basement door, but she didn't know if it was unlocked at this hour, and she didn't want to risk Mike's parents seeing her, so she walked around the side of the garage and, instead of going straight to the door, she climbed on top of the garbage bin on the back of the house, like Will had told her Jonathan did sometimes when he wanted to sneak in to spend the night with Nancy.

She only had to help herself a little bit with her powers before she was pulling up to the low roof of the garage, and then she knocked on the window carefully. Nancy was smiling as she opened the window, but then the expression morphed to surprise and worry when she saw that the silhouette on the other side of her darkened window was not her boyfriend but a weeping teenage girl. "El? What are you doing here? Are you okay?"

El tried to control her sobs long enough to mutter "M-mike" in a choked voice. To her credit, Nancy seemed to understand exactly what she needed, pulling her inside and immediately guiding her to Mike's room with an arm around her shoulders.

Nancy knocked on the door a few times, and then took a long while

for any response to come from the other side. El, who was trying to curb her crying in fear of waking up Nancy's parents, was starting to think that knocking wouldn't be enough to wake Mike up. After a minute or so, however, the door opened and a sleepy Mike, his hair messy and pointing in every direction, came out to meet them.

"It's two a.m., what—" He was frowning at his sister and seemingly about to complain about being woken up when he noticed El standing beside Nancy, tear still streaming down her cheeks. "El? What's going on? Did something happen?"

She didn't explain— couldn't, not yet— and instead just rushed into his arms, which came up to wrap around her shoulders almost instantaneously. She was cold, and he was warm. She snuggled closer, sniffing against the fabric of the *Superman III* t-shirt he wore to bed.

"She didn't say," she heard Nancy whisper to her brother, in response to what El imagined was a questioning look from Mike, but of course Nancy didn't know any more than he did at that point because El had not explained. "Okay, you two need to get in there before Mom catches wind of this," she declared, still keeping her voice as low as possible. "And hey: No funny business."

El felt, more than heard, Mike scoff. "She's *upset*, what do you think I'm gonna—" He cut himself off. "You know what? Just— go to bed, Nancy," he hissed in conclusion. Before El could see Nancy's response, Mike was turning around, arms still around her, and gently guiding her into his room, the door closing behind him.

He led her to his bed, where she sat down, and he knelt directly in front of her, looking up at her with a worried expression. "What's wrong, El? Why did you leave the cabin? And why are you crying?" he asked. "Please tell me so I can help."

She looked down to meet his earnest gaze, so pretty, and it only made her cry harder. Because she knew Mike cared about her, but she had thought that Hopper cared about her, too, and now she wasn't so sure. "Hopper—" she started between sobs. "Hopper told Papa where I was," she finally let him know.



"What?!" Mike exclaimed immediately. "But Brenner's dead, how could he—" He shook his head, as if deciding that wasn't the most important thing to know at the moment. "We have to get you out of here," he then declared, quickly pushing himself up to his feet.

Before he could rush to the door, however, El held him back by his t-shirt. "Not today," she clarified as he turned to look at her. "The week we met. At the school, with the demogorgon," she added, and his expression became less frantic as realization sunk in.

"Oh," he said, sitting down on the bed beside her as he thought this through. "But why the hell would he do that?!" he inquired further, turning his head to look at her. "They were going to kill us! They wanted to take you back to the lab! Why would that asshole *want* that to happen?" He shook his head, getting more and more riled up with every word that came out of his mouth.

"Mike..." El tried to get his attention.

He was on a roll, however, and completely missed her intervention. "We had to face a freaking monster! On our own! And on top of that, then he *hid* you from us for an entire year!" he kept up his rant. "What the hell is *wrong* with him?!"

"Mike!" El repeats, this time touching his arm to snap him out of his bubble of indignation. It worked this time, as he immediately snapped his head back to the side, to look at her.

"Sorry," he said, contrite. "I'm probably not making you feel any better, am I?" he admitted sheepishly.

She wiped tears from her cheeks, her other hand seeking his as she leaned her head on his shoulder. "It's okay," she replied, not really caring. As long as he was near, she was happy. She didn't like to see him angry, but it was nice that he got so incensed on her behalf. It meant he really did care.

"I understand why you had to come here now," he said, intertwining his fingers with hers as his thumb rubbed calming circles against her knuckle. "I just don't understand why he would do that. I thought he was on our side. Did he even have the decency to try and explain?"

he asked.

"He said... he had to," El relayed, closing her eyes. "To save Will. He thought Nancy and Jonathan would help us."

"But then... oh," Mike said, sounding like he was talking to himself more than to her. "Okay. I think that actually makes sense." When she opened her eyes again to look at him curiously, he elaborated. "Will didn't have much time that night. I can see how Hopper must've thought that was his priority."

"Pri-orty?" El asked. She had never heard that word.

"It means the most important thing you have to do," Mike was quick to explain. "They had to find him quickly, or he would die. His mom said that when they found him they had to perform CPR on him."

"What's CPR?" Eleven asked. One thing she found very annoying the more she learned of the "real" world was when they used letters to name a thing. She never understood what the letters stood for, and lots of things had the same letters, so it got really confusing sometimes.

"CPR is what you do when someone's not breathing, or when their heart stops," Mike explained again. "They had to breathe into his mouth and push hard at his chest so he would... well, so he would come back to life, basically." He pursed his lips for a moment. "If they had waited any longer, it might not have worked."

El's breath caught. She knew Will could've died in the Upside Down—she'd been there herself, and had seen with her own eyes that it was a decidedly hostile environment— but she didn't know he'd been *that* close to death. Meanwhile, the bad men wanted her back alive; they would've taken her back to the lab, but they wouldn't have killed her. Was that why Hopper had chosen to tell them where she was in exchange for equipment to go find Will?

But then, what about the others? She would never forget the sight of the bad men aiming guns straight at her friends— at Mike. If she hadn't been there, they would've killed them. Had Hopper even thought about that? Had he thought about the fact that they would

be facing the demogorgon all on their own?

"And Nancy and Jonathan were supposed to be there with us," Mike continued speaking, unaware of the thoughts running through El's head. "Hopper probably thought they'd be able to protect us, at least until he and Joyce got back. He didn't know they would leave. And they'd already faced the demogorgon once, after all. He didn't know you'd disappear."

His expression drew into a frown as he heard himself say that last sentence. "But wait, Hopper didn't know the demogorgon would come after us. It only appeared at school because of the blood, when you killed that lady and the bad men that were with her..."

He was right, El recognized as he explained. Hopper couldn't have known the demogorgon would appear at the school. He probably thought the bad men were the worst they would face, and was hoping Nancy and Jonathan would be able to talk them out of killing everyone, or at least help them escape. He *did* say before she ran out of the cabin that he thought the teens would "get them out of there."

"I think..." Mike continued. "I think maybe Hopper was just doing what he thought was right. I mean, don't get me wrong," he hurriedly clarified, "it was still a shitty thing to do. He knew how scared you were of going back to the lab. He knew what that would do to you. He should've found another way," he insisted, his jaw clenched. "But maybe he thought it was the least bad option."

"Still hurts," El stated because that's how she felt. She wasn't as angry as she'd been when she left the cabin, but she was still sad. Hopper had taken care of her for over a year now, and she'd grown to love him like a father. He *was* her father, as far as legalities went. So why hadn't he told her? Why had he lied?

"I know," Mike replied, letting go of her hand so he could wrap his arm around her shoulders comfortingly.

"I thought he cared," she whispered, her tears subsiding, but the clamp around her heart still holding strong.

"I think... I think he does care about you," Mike said, almost like he

didn't want to say it, but looking like he had to. "I mean, maybe he didn't know you very well back then. But he was looking for you in the forest, right? You said so. He left you food and stuff. Maybe he felt guilty for what happened."

El had to admit that made sense. When she'd been on her own in the forest, she hadn't expected anyone to take care of her. But Hopper had. Or he had tried, anyway. He left her food, and even Eggos—something he thought she might like. And he didn't know her any better at that point, so what had changed? Maybe he knew what he did was wrong, and was trying to make up for it somehow.

"And then when he found you, he took you in," Mike continued, his fingers stroking up and down her arm. "And he kept you safe for over a year. I'm still not happy that he kept you from us, but taking you off the grid was the right thing to do to keep you safe from the lab people," he added with a shrug.

El smiled a bit at that, thinking it was easy for Mike to say, given that he wasn't the one who had to stay stuck in a cabin in the middle of nowhere for months on end. But she did get it. Hopper didn't *have* to take her in, especially not after what happened to his daughter. He could've turned her in then if that's what he really wanted. He could've sent her elsewhere, washed his hands off her and the troubles she brought with her. He didn't have to give up his entire life for over a year to take care of her, protect her, give her a home. That wasn't nothing. That was everything. Should she write him off completely because of one wrong action he took before he even really knew her?

"I was so mad at him that night," Mike admitted as he continued speaking, still not aware of the myriad thoughts crossing her mind at that point. "I screamed at him, called him a piece of shit. I even punched him."

El couldn't help it; her eyes widened. "You *punched* Hopper?" she asked, trying to picture the scene in her mind and failing utterly. Mike had never told her what transpired between him and Hopper the night she came back, and now the conversation seemed even more eventful than she'd initially imagined.

Mike snorted. "Well, I *tried*," he confirmed sheepishly. "I was so pissed, I couldn't really control myself. I was just seeing red," he added with a shrug. El had heard that expression before, knew it to mean the person was really, really angry. "But he didn't mind," he added, looking down at her face. "He could've put me in my place; I probably deserved it. But all he wanted was for me not to be mad at you."

El felt tears prickle at the corners of her eyes again, the vice grip around her heart becoming more of a tug. Hopper did care. But he had still lied to her, and that wasn't okay. "So what do I do?" she asked, wrapping both her arms around Mike's waist and snuggling just a little closer to his side.

"I think you should talk to him," Mike advised gently. "I mean, I'm not saying you have to forgive him straight away. I sure didn't," he added with a scoff. "But you could at least let him explain. I don't think he would do anything like that to you again." He shrugged. "Like it or not, he's your dad now. You gotta hear him out."

El nodded against his shoulder, deciding she might as well. She remembered how remorseful he looked earlier when he told her what he did; she didn't think he was faking that, just like he hadn't been faking caring about her this entire time. And she loved him, she really did. She didn't like fighting with him, but this she needed to know. They had to clear the air— another expression she'd only recently learned— and then they'd be okay again. That's how it always worked.

"But not tonight, okay?" Mike added, leaning his cheek against the crown of her head. "It's late and it's dangerous for you to be walking by yourself in the dark. You can sleep here and I'll take you back to the cabin before school, okay?"

She nodded again, and then he gestured for her to lay down on the bed. As she did, he moved to find his sleeping bag inside his closet so he could sleep on the floor, but then she asked if he could sleep beside her— she thought sleeping near him would prevent her from having another nightmare about Papa and the lab— and he couldn't say no. They spent the next few hours cuddled together under Mike's blanket, until Nancy came into the room at around 5:30 to wake

them up so that they could sneak El out before their parents woke up.

"We'll go out the back door. Dad won't wake up if we're quiet," Mike explained, and El remembered that his dad spent most nights on the La-Z-Boy in the living room, so if they were careful he wouldn't see them at all. "I'll bike you home."

"No," El retorted, her gaze fixated on the view outside Mike's window. "Hopper's outside," she added when he turned his confused gaze on her, and he came up behind her to look where she was looking, finally noticing the Blazer parked a comfortable distance away from Mike's house, just barely in sight. They hadn't heard any cars approaching since they woke up, so he must've been there for a while; probably not long after El herself arrived. Hopper knew she would come to Mike. He knew her well.

"Okay," Mike agreed. He turned around and grabbed the first bit of cover he could find: his navy blue zip-up hoodie that was draped over his desk chair. "Take this," he told her as he handed it to her. "It's not very warm, but pull the hood over your head anyway. It's still dark, but it will give you some cover in case anyone nearby happens to be looking out a window."

She nodded and let him lead her to the basement as she put it on. The fabric was thin, but she felt herself be wrapped in the warmth and smell that was Mike, just as she had while they were sleeping. She loved it.

They hugged goodbye at the basement door, Mike standing under the doorframe watching over her until she finally made her way to Hopper's car. She opened the passenger-side door and saw Hopper's form in the driver's seat jolt as if he'd been asleep and wasn't expecting any sudden noises.

She got into the passenger seat and pulled the door closed, Hopper's tired, red eyes following her every move. She kept her gaze to the front of the vehicle. He stared at her for a moment longer—probably judging whether she was about to cause something to explode—before sighing.

"I'm sorry," he finally said, although she wasn't sure what exactly he

was apologizing about. Selling her out to Papa? Lying to her? "I should've told you sooner," he then clarified. "Will you let me explain?" He sounded worried— of how she would react, she figured — but on top of that he sounded sincere to her ears. Still, that didn't mean all was forgiven.

She nodded. "Let's go home." He looked at her for just a couple of seconds longer before nodding to himself and turning the key in the ignition. As they pulled away down Maple street, she snuck a glance back at Mike's house. It was too far away and still too dark for her to really see, but she could've sworn she saw a figure in white, red, and blue standing at Mike's second-floor window, and it made her smile.

It was always nice to know that someone cared.

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**Notes:** *Superman III*, the third of the *Superman* live-action film adaptations, was released in 1983; it was critically panned, and I don't think Mike would like it all that much, which is probably why he's wearing the t-shirt to sleep. The title of this story comes from Dusty Springfield's 1972 song of the same name, which I am convinced El would absolutely adore. Also, fun fact, because I am a nerd and looked it up: In Indiana, it wasn't mandatory by law to wear a seat belt until July 1st, 1987.

I didn't get that many hits/kudos/comments on my last story— not that I blame you guys, I know the sad ones aren't as popular and I totally understand that— but I'm really gonna have to ask you to leave kudos and comments on this one because I'm starting to run out of ideas for the first time since October, and since the fandom seems half dead as it stands, it's probably not a good idea for me to start running out of ideas right now, lol. Talking about these characters in the comments with you guys does help spark my imagination, so if you'd like to see more stories from me, commenting is a surefire way to give me a jump start.

Also, I have to warn you all again: the next story I'm going to write

(if I ever finish it because it's... a bit of an undertaking, to say the least) will be an AU story. Well, ish. Not entirely. More like canon divergence, I guess, if you squint and turn your head, but it will definitely, positively, absolutely not be part of the Quiet Moments series. So if you don't want to miss it, make sure you're subscribed directly to my profile instead of just to the series. Don't say I didn't warn you!

PS: Did you guys hear the news that *Stranger Things* books are going to start coming out, starting this fall? I would like to hug whoever came up with that genius idea, because YES!